

From: nsparks [REDACTED]
To: archonshb [REDACTED]; sbenjamin <sbenjamin@epiphanyglobalschool.org>
Bcc: catsparks [REDACTED]
Subject: Nicholas here
Date: Sun, Nov 17, 2013 11:24 am

Saul,

In a little while, I'll be sending you my opening remarks for the BOT Forum. I'm just waiting for Trustee comments first.

In regard to your letter: first I want to thank you for writing to the BOT. While I may have more specific comments later, I'm glad that you seem to fully understand the severity of the crisis at the present time.

On a personal level, I'm both angry and frustrated. Again, my life is being made very difficult, and I don't have time for this. I told you this would happen and the BOT told you this would happen if you didn't follow our advice, which was simply, "don't rock the boat on this particular issue." Now, I'm having to put out fires -- big, raging infernos -- because of some of the things that have occurred since the opening days of school.

Trust is hard to attain; it's even harder to regain when lost, and it will be a rough road for you for a while, even among the BOT. Unfortunately, I can't help you with that, other than to again offer my advice. So here goes:

- 1) As I've noted before, you are perceived by some employees to be arrogant, rude and condescending; to these people, you should apologize. I know you want names, but frankly, I don't know that it's all that important. I think you should sit down first -- in order -- with your leadership team, then the rest of the admin, then the faculty, either one by one or in groups, and ... apologize if necessary. And ask them to give you another chance. (Without defensiveness, by the way.) And ask them to frankly call you on it if you do such things again. You are blessed with a very good team and they should all feel appreciated for what they do.
- 2) You should handle the situation with the [REDACTED] ... and again, keep in mind, they perceived that you were threatening [REDACTED] even if (in your mind) you weren't, and then making a demand that he do something in direct contradiction to his faith. Again, I'd start with an apology, and then listen ... and then ask what YOU can do to make it better.
- 3) Make sure all Christian traditions feel especially Christian, especially as we move into the Christmas season.
- 4) Understand that many people now perceive you as having an agenda with which they disagree. Again, you chose to rock this boat early and hard, not only with Chapel changes (including 4 bells, not 3), but with what some perceive as an agenda that strives to make homosexuality open and accepted -- and not only that, it's one of the most important things we need to do to "fix our school." (Perception matters). My opinion is you should have waited at least a year for these kinds of things -- and I said as much to you numerous times -- and I'm not sure how you can fix it, other than to do the things you outlined in your letter. As for the "Club," there obviously can't be one now, though you might open your doors at your home if you feel qualified to talk to them about it in small group settings.
- 5) Numbers 1 and 4, when brought together, seem to imply that you believe the "school needed to be fixed." Academically, yes. Financially, yes. Curricular integration/improvement? Certainly. But spiritually? Frankly, we were good there: it is, and has been since its founding, a kind school, where everyone is kind; it is in fact, the KINDEST school I've ever visited. There has not, for instance, been a single fight in 8 years at the school. People accept other people here; our first student were Jewish. And until the last 2 months, nearly everyone was fine with how we implemented the Christian traditions at the school, which frankly, go a long way toward creating the culture of kindness.
- 6) As to the agenda people assume you have, you can't really blame them for thinking such things. Let's look at the first couple of months: Chapel has changed (Christian equivalence of Islam and Judaism, for example), there's a lot of talk about diversity and how we're awful because we don't have it, we need to have a "GLBT Club," we need to support the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, your references to our non-discrimination policy (as opposed, let's say, to a much heavier emphasis on "celebrating our Christian traditions" ... and on the other hand, not only don't we have a

chaplain, but no one really knows what's going on with the chaplain search. It's easy to see why people believe that you think your "beliefs" are more more important than theirs ... which is the very definition of "having an agenda."

A couple of other things that you need to take to heart:

- 1) To do the things we need to do academically/globally/faculty/financial, you have to first win their hearts. You've lost a lot of hearts lately.
- 2) The BOT is in a terrible position right now. And it was, I remember, the one thing we needed you NOT to do.
- 3) While we on the BOT grant that YOU will hire the Chaplain, I must also let you know that there are many, many people who don't believe you will hire the right person for this school and in this community. If I were you, I'd make it even more inclusive than you originally planned, and take their (the community's) recommendations to heart. This is the most important hiring decision you will make this year, and you will either lose people's trust, or gain it, maybe this time for good.
- 4) Regarding diversity, I've now told you half a dozen times that our lack of diversity has NOTHING to do with the school, or anyone at the school. It's not because of what we as a school, has or hasn't done. It has nothing to do with racism, or vestiges of Jim Crow. It comes down to 1) Money and 2) Culture. Even when you have the money, it will be hard sledding, no matter what Jenna does as far as outreach. My point is, if you continually bring this up at the school, it seems to imply that it's the school's fault; that people at the school have done something wrong (which again, goes to numbers 1, 4 & 5). Again, it's not the fault of the school, or anyone at the school, including Janet!!!! If you want to talk to someone about diversity, talk to Jenna (who's designing the diversity scholarship program) or me (who will be responsible for raising the money to fund the scholarship program once Jenna has designed it.)
- 5) The school was not "broken." It's a great place. It has grown EVERY year since our founding. It needed some academic/global/curricular/financial improvements, but MOST SCHOOLS DO.
- 6) While Dr. Ashton is qualified as a teacher, I noticed that he's not been a school Chaplain before, and I think we have to go with someone who has specific experience in this area. The Chaplain, after all, should be someone who is not only a teacher, but the kind of person who goes to nearly every co-curricular event, the kind that parents love, another face of the school, and *almost a youth pastor in temperament*. Just my opinion at first glance, though I haven't met him obviously.

Please regard this email in the spirit in which it was intended. While I am angry and frustrated, I'm still the Chairman, and it's part of my job to help you navigate these waters.

I wish you well, and enjoy your time with Dr. Ashton today.

Nicholas